



# RUN FOR LIFE

BY EUGENE YIGA



Since blasting onto the trail running scene in 2008, Ryan Sandes has captured the hearts and imaginations of people all over the world. He's now written a book to show that our minds are powerful and that we can achieve a lot more than we think.

## **WHEN DID YOU FIRST START RUNNING?**

I started running during my final year at university, while doing my honours in quantity surveying. I had some friends running a half-marathon so I decided to join them.

## **WHEN DID YOU SWITCH TO RUNNING AS YOUR MAIN CAREER?**

In 2009, I decided to take a bit of a risk and started running full-time. I didn't have enough sponsorship to get by on a monthly basis but I had some money saved. Luckily, the risk paid off and it all worked out for me.

## **WHAT WAS THE REACTION FROM YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS?**

My friends thought I was crazy but were all happy for me. My dad and mom are my biggest supporters, however my dad did suggest keeping my 9-to-5 job as the economy was about to go into a recession.

## **HOW HAS YOUR CHOSEN CAREER AS A RUNNER CHANGED YOU?**

Running ultra-distance races and being a party animal don't go well together. I tried to do both for a bit but that didn't work. I had to choose so I transitioned from party animal to spending more time in the mountains. I am an all-or-nothing person so when I chose running, I threw everything at it!

## **WHAT WAS THE HARDEST THING WHEN YOU STARTED RUNNING PROFESSIONALLY?**

I had cut back on seeing my friends, which was hard. We all grew up together and they shaped me into the person I am today. They are supportive though and I do catch up with them from time to time.

## **WHAT ARE SOME OF THE HARSHTEST CONDITIONS YOU'VE HAD TO FACE?**

Running in 45+ degree temperatures in the Sahara Desert, swimming across caiman-infested rivers in the Amazon Jungle, or running at over 4000 meters of altitude in Colorado. I have run into the odd big snake too!

## **WHAT'S BEEN THE MOST DIFFICULT MOMENT YOU'VE EXPERIENCED IN A RACE?**

Dropping out of the Ultra Trail Mont Blanc last year due to not being recovered from glandular fever was tough. Mentally I wanted to do well, but physically my body wouldn't let me. I hit rock bottom in my running career after that.

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**BESIDES THE PHYSICAL DEMANDS, WHAT HAS BEEN CHALLENGING FOR YOU SO FAR?**

During a race you go through a number of highs and lows that affect you mentally and physically. Mentally you feel drained and physically your body wants to stop. It can be a challenge to get through these low moments.

**HOW DO YOU GET THROUGH THESE DIFFICULT TIMES?**

It's important to stay calm and focus on the positives. When I am going through a tough situation I break the run down into mini-goals and just focus on getting through one kilometre at a time. Mentally I find this more achievable and it helps me get through low patches in a race.

**WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT RUNNING THAT KEEPS YOU GOING?**

I enjoy the challenge of setting a goal and achieving it. I enjoy the freedom trail running gives me; it's a form of escape from reality. There is nothing to worry about when running.

**WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR BIGGEST HIGHLIGHTS AS A RUNNER?**

Winning my first ultra (the 4 Deserts Gobi Race, where the numbers vary from 180 to 400 runners) and winning an ultra-race on every continent.

**WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE WHEN YOU WIN A RACE?**

A massive sense of achievement and elation. Looking back now, I am proud of my victories but it is all the little experiences and moments leading up to my victories that I remember most.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE TO RUN?**

There are too many to name! Table Mountain will always be special to me as it is an extension of my back garden. Patagonia is incredible and it is always humbling running in the Alps.

**HOW DO THE MARATHONS ABROAD COMPARE TO OUR LOCAL RACES?**

Every race is different but we have some great races at home in South Africa. The ultra-running scene is a lot bigger in Europe, US, and some of the other countries. In France or Spain, it is not uncommon to have 20 000 or 30 000 spectators.

**DO YOU GET TO EXPERIENCE THE DIFFERENT COUNTRIES YOU GO TO?**

Running through a country is the best way to experience a place first-hand as you have direct interaction with the people and nature.



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I always try and explore as much of the country as possible when visiting it. The world is such a big place so I feel fortunate to have raced and run on all seven continents. I have met so many awesome people and had some great experiences.

**“I LEARNED A LOT FROM THE SITUATION AND THINK I’M A STRONGER PERSON NOW BECAUSE OF IT.”** - RYAN SANDES ON HIS MOST

DIFFICULT MOMENT DURING A RACE.

### WHAT IS YOUR SCHEDULE LIKE NOW?

I normally run three to four key races a year, depending on the distance. When I’m not racing or preparing for a race, I like to chill out. I spend time with my wife Vanessa and our four-legged child “T-dog”. We often go to the beach, go for walks, and braai at home. I also like catching up with friends and having a bit of a laugh.

### WHAT IS YOUR BOOK TRAIL BLAZER ABOUT?

Trail Blazer is about my life to date. I never aspired to be a runner but now running means so much to me. I talk about what I have learned through my experiences and have included a number of reader take-outs for endurance athletes. I hope that by telling my story I will inspire other people to go out and live their dreams.



### WHAT FINAL MESSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE TO OUR READERS?

Focus on the positives in your life and make the most of them. You only live once and are in control of your own destiny. Follow Ryan’s runs at

